

The Contextual Universe Part Three

Copyright 2011 J. Michael Strawn

Synopsis: This lesson, third in the series, shows how the statements of Joshua and Caleb in Numbers 13 not only contrasted with those of the ten other spies who were unfaithful, these words also reveal steps or strategies for today's Christian. Building on the previous two truths (one, *The temporal order, our experience, and our situations are not the context for the mind; but there is a singular context, the reality of God*; and two, *All critical representations are leveraged by Scripture*), the third step shows that the ten unfaithful spies' words teach us that one must *consciously avoid the structural elimination of God*.

Scripture passage: Numbers 13:31-33

The words of the unfaithful spies were rationalized statements, and in these statements, they structurally eliminated God from the moment. (Because God is inherently involved in the events in which He both builds and tests faith, He is part of that structure as we regard it -- unless we so represent the circumstance as to eliminate Him as part of that structure.) And of course as Jesus reminds us, we have no control over any aspect of time except each present moment.

Of course God can be invoked at any time, but invoking the name of God is not the same thing as structurally including him in the moment. The same is true of the practice of referencing and invoking Scripture. Just quoting it does not mean that the speaker includes Scripture and the God behind it as structure of that present moment or circumstance.

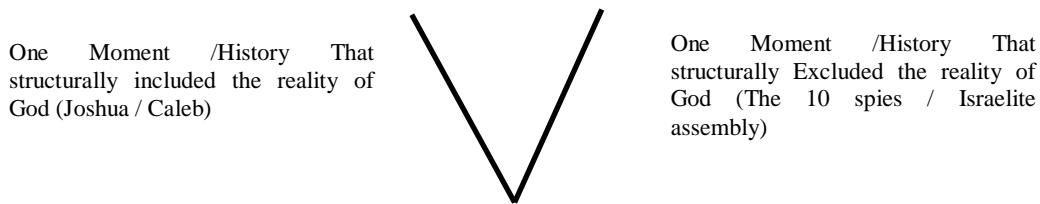
Quite in contrast, Joshua and Caleb believed God was the very axis of the moment, around which the moment itself revolved. In fact, they believed He was the axis of everything in the world which revolved around Him. Because they operated quite literally on the reality of God – which we have previously defined as being comprised of the power of God and the Word of God – their words showed that this reality was the primary agent of language. That is, the reality of God controlled what they said. However, the ten spies showed that their own experience of the moment controlled their language.

It is axiomatic: If God is eliminated from language, He is eliminated from the moment. The unfaithful spies in essence eliminated Him from the moment because they did not see Him as determinant in any sense. In essence they eliminated Him from that segment of history, in the same way that any of us who do not prioritize the reality of God (again, which is comprised of the Word of God and the power of God) also eliminate Him as the structural element of history.

Caleb in Numbers 13:30 shows overt evidence of his *structural inclusion* of God in the moment. In fact, his example shows how we can similarly include God in our moment. Caleb's language was the expression of how he understood the moment and history, and the relationship between God and time.

At Kadesh, there were two moments and two histories. One of these moments or histories structurally included the reality of God and their language showed how Joshua and Caleb viewed

the moment and history. The words of the unfaithful spies – and later the whole Israelite nation whom they persuaded to sin – showed that they structurally excluded God from the moment and history.



We can clearly see this by looking at the spies' individual statements:

- A. 13:31. **“We can’t attack those people-- they are stronger than we are.”** Despite their experiences with surviving the Ten Plagues of Egypt, despite their crossing of the Red Sea, despite their meals of manna, the spies were unchanged in their view of the moment. In fact, it could be that what we call worldview compresses down to two views of the moment. In one, God is structurally included in the moment. In the other, He is structurally eliminated by the faithless person from the moment. God is either involved or He is not.

The representational elimination of God from the moment is defacto atheism. It is rank humanism to eliminate God from the representational universe. When one does this, one rejects the opportunity to cross the cognitive limit. It is not a question of one's ability, but of one's will. We either cross the cognitive limit in the moment or we refuse to do so. Our words and actions in every circumstance declare that we believe the universe is either bounded by a horizon enforced by the cognitive limit – or bounded by the reality of God.

Apparently the ten spies began the 40 day mission convinced that they were capable of grasping the whole meaning of the situation merely by relying on their human critical faculties. In other words, they believed they could observe the land and then think “critically” to an assessment of how to deal with what they observed. Such a notion may have been an ideal of the so-called “Enlightenment,” but the ten spies practiced it long before that time. In fact, such a reliance on the supposed ability of humans to evaluate and act on their own experience was seen in the Garden of Eden when Satan tempted Eve, and when Abraham and Sarah conspired to include Hagar in their family, and when David faithlessly numbered his troops. Wherever there is confidence in the reliability of faith in human critical faculties, faithlessness always follows.

Why is that? Because the human critical faculty always structurally eliminates God from the moment.

- B. Numbers 13:32: **“The land we explored devours those living in it.”** One might ask, were they referring to the geography and other parameters of the land – was it too big, too beyond their abilities to take? The fact is, they believed their efforts were neutralized before they even began because of the “facts” of the land. Therefore the reality of God, in their minds, couldn't have a significant role in any potential victory. They thought the universe itself made this an impossible task – the undeniable contrasts of a land that was

too big and a people who were too small. The Lord was thus “washed out” of the universe, because the realities of the universe they lived in meant He couldn’t be a significant factor any more.

Exaggeration, that most human of attributes, played an important role in this whole situation. The ten spies used exaggeration in ever-increasing ways that carried the weight of the argument. In fact, the exaggerations of the unfaithful spies seemed to their listeners to carry the moment beyond the reach of God Himself. These ten men consciously used language to manufacture reality in the minds of their listeners. The 10 faithless lured the Israelites to want to go back to Egypt, back to the predictable. People are afraid of the unpredictable, of things that can spin out of their control. If given a choice, many people won’t tolerate the unpredictable, and that’s what trusting in God seemed to be. Predictability, in fact, is a function of the cognitive limit.

Faith puts you beyond the predictable, because though we serve a consistent and reliable God, He often does not act in our moments in ways we predict, or consider consistent. It is a distressing fact that if you live by faith in such a God, you have to give up reliance on predictability.

Our great heroes of faith in the Bible went through a process of structurally eliminating something – they eliminated predictability when they acted in faith. After his mistake with Hagar, Abraham no longer looked for predictability when he went up the mountain to sacrifice his son. Others who threw the full weight of their faith onto God found that they lived the rest of their lives in ways they probably never predicted.

Quite in contrast, the language of the 10 spies is an appeal to guard predictability and keep it a part of daily existence.

- C. Numbers 13:32b, 33a. **“All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim).”** In other words, said the spies, the force ratio is all wrong. We have no advantage, only disadvantage. By this they were trying to conjure up images in the minds of their listeners with the purpose of trying to bias the minds of their listeners against Caleb’s statements: Caleb was urging trust in the reality of God - He who is invisible. The images of the ten spies were predictive in their nature, nearly demanding of the listeners that they join in the imaginative experience. In this case, the spies used imagination as a tool to hold their listeners firmly within the cognitive limit.

But the purpose and prerogative of spiritual leadership is not to keep people within the cognitive limit! They should use their God-given mandate to take people beyond the cognitive limit toward faith in the unseen. And as all good shepherds do (1 Peter 5:1-4, John 4), they should be out in front, leading the way across the cognitive limit.

The 10 were not spiritual in any sense. A spiritual leader leads beyond the cognitive limit. This is far beyond mere management. It wars against all notions of being “a realist.” However, unfortunately sometimes we select our leaders because they keep the cognitive limit in place and won’t take us beyond this.

D. 13:33. **“We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes and we seemed the same to them.”** From within the cognitive limit, a strategy is born: the strategy of disparagement. Do not believe that the conquest is possible, says a leader from the near side of the cognitive limit. In this, they were honest. Yet their honesty counts for nothing, because it is only honesty in the service of faithlessness. If one honestly does not believe, that merits nothing from God except judgment!

In fact, when the ten spies “spread the bad report,” they made operational this strategy of disparagement. But notice – they did not directly disparage God nor His Word. They only disparaged the land. The more they criticized it, there was inversely a decrease in appreciation of the reality of God and what He could do. The greater the enemies seemed, the less reason to have confidence in an unseen God and His power. This was the working of a perverse intelligence, one we see operational as we represent our own daunting circumstances with an inversely decreasing confidence in the power of God. Bluntly exemplified: The bigger the cancer, the less the reason to trust in God to heal it.

So the influence of the cognitive limit grows when we use language to urge that someone rely on the critical faculties. With such language there is a tendency to decrease reliance on the reality of God.

This is why the spies said what they said. It’s the power of the inverse, and it shows up in the Garden of Eden and every circumstance since, where the power and range of human intelligence is pushed – and the result is always a decrease in confidence in the power of God.

Another way of saying this is the more we try to transcend the cognitive limit, the less confidence we have in the critical human faculties. But this can go both ways – the greater the confidence in God, the more permeable and insignificant the cognitive limit. One must make a choice. In the case of the Israelites, they ended up functioning as defacto atheists because their words and actions showed they believed that even if God existed (which they probably would not have denied), He was not structurally part of the situation.

In John 11, we see this inverse position exemplified in the death of Jesus’ dear friend Lazarus. For Martha his sister, she saw a decrease in the power of God with the passage of time.

The philosophies and practices of positivism and rationalism demonstrate this. As they grow, confidence in God diminishes. A lawful determinancy is seen here too.

The more we believe in the reality of God, the inverse is a decrease in the trust of self, and even more specifically, trust in one’s own experience of the universe. Complete trust of God means no rebellion against Him, nor fear of following Him.